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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001074

SIPDIS

EUR/CE FOR MORRIS, PIERANGELO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [BO](#) [PL](#)
SUBJECT: BELARUS/POLAND - MFA CONTINUES TO LOBBY FOR
SOFTENING OF EU VISA BAN

REF: WARSAW 1053

Classified By: DCM QUANRUD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Polish MFA officials told us that Belarusian FM Martynov took a "soft, friendly" tone in his September 12 meeting with FM Sikorski. They attributed the meeting's success -- and Belarus' apparent warming to the West -- as a reaction to Russian actions in Georgia and a growing Belarusian interest in Polish investment. Martynov made it clear that Belarus expects "gestures" from the EU (i.e., lifting the EU's visa ban) in exchange for more democratic parliamentary elections September 28. We expect Poland to continue to lobby for softening, if not lifting the EU visa ban, should the election outcome be deemed free and fair. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Polish MFA Deputy Director for Eastern Policy (and former Polish Ambassador to Belarus) Mateusz Maszkiewicz told us September 15 that FM Sikorski was pleased with the "soft, friendly" tone taken by Belarusian FM Martynov in their September 12 meeting. The meeting featured an hour-long one-on-one, followed by a larger plenary session which included economic and cultural representatives from each side.

VISIT FEATURED ON BELARUS STATE TELEVISION

¶3. (C) Of note, Maszkiewicz said, was the visit's prominent treatment on "Panorama," Belarusian state television's "most important" news program. According to Maszkiewicz, the television program characterized Poland as Belarus' new best friend and most important cultural and economic partner. The program also said Poland has become Belarus' "promoter" in the EU.

MARTYNOV STRESSES GOB'S HONEST INTENTIONS ON ELECTIONS

¶4. (C) Maszkiewicz reported that Sikorski had stressed EU and Polish interest in this month's parliamentary elections. Sikorski welcomed the fact that Belarus had allowed in OSCE observers. In return, Maszkiewicz said, Martynov made clear that the GOB expects "gestures" from the EU -- a reference to lifting the visa ban -- in exchange for more democratic and participatory elections. Martynov repeatedly offered assurances that it was the GOB's "honest intention" to allow more democratic elections. (COMMENT: When pressed, Maszkiewicz acknowledged that Martynov's influence in domestic affairs is limited, but he remained nonetheless optimistic and visibly enthusiastic. END COMMENT)

BELARUS MOTIVATED BY GEORGIA, ECONOMIC TIES

¶5. (C) Maszkiewicz insisted that the apparent change in Belarus' position is an indication that the "hard policy" advocated by Poland has been successful. He also reiterated that Belarus is trying to forge good relations with Europe and the United States in response to Russian activity in

Georgia (reftel). Martynov was reportedly ecstatic about the U.S. decision to suspend temporarily sanctions on two Belarusian companies, and emphasized the symbolic importance of DAS Merkel's recent visit. Maszkiewicz said the Belarusian delegation displayed keen interest in strengthening bilateral economic relations and in promoting Polish investment in Belarus. (NOTE: In a separate meeting, the Polish Consul General in Brest told DCM that Sikorski believed that just holding the meeting was a success. According to the CG, the Belarusians do not seem interested in overly close ties with the EU, but are trying to create some space for maneuver between themselves and the Russians. END NOTE.)

POLAND LOBBYING EU MEMBER STATES ON VISA BAN

¶6. (C) Maszkiewicz said Poland, Lithuania, and Sweden had pressed hard in advance of this week's GAERC to include some reference to a possible lifting of the visa ban (post elections) in the GAERC conclusions as an incentive for a more democratic outcome. He expressed satisfaction that the conclusions mention relaxing "restrictive measures," but said the MFA did not yet have a clear sense of what that might entail. Maszkiewicz said various proposals are still under discussion in the MFA, up to and including lifting the visa ban entirely and leaving it up to individual consular officers to decide whether specific Belarusian authorities qualify for Schengen visas. Maszkiewicz added that any change to the EU's visa ban would require at least 5-6 weeks to implement, depending on the outcome of the September 28 parliamentary elections.

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PROGRESS ON POLISH MINORITY

¶7. (C) Maszkiewicz said there had also been progress on a long-standing bilateral problem concerning Polish minorities, with the Belarusian side reportedly agreeing to allow the reconstitution of the Polish Union, an organization dedicated to upholding the rights of the Polish minority in Belarus which has faced pressure from the GOB. Maszkiewicz said the MFA expects to see tangible progress on this by the end of the year.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) FM Sikorski entered office intent on modeling Poland's approach to Belarus on U.S. treatment of Poland under communism -- a distinctly softer approach than under the previous government. We expect FM Sikorski will continue to lobby his EU colleagues to soften, if not lift, the visa ban should elections meet the democratic test. According to Maszkiewicz and other MFA interlocutors, Belarusian authorities prize the ability to travel to the EU above all other deliverables. We continue to press Poland and other EU member states to offer other incentives first. Removing the visa ban may be the grand prize for demonstrable progress on the full range of human rights issues.

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